

## THEIR DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

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Thomas brought from the office the letter which told that Aunt Margaret was coming. "I will spend the entire summer with you," the letter said. Thomas was very much pleased. He was sixteen years old now, but had been only six when he last saw Aunt Margaret, yet he remembered her well. She had been very good to him. When everyone else was busy about the house Aunt Margaret had plenty of time. That was the great charm about Aunt Margaret, she always had plenty of time to do anything or help anyone. He remembered, altho he was now a great boy of sixteen, that Aunt Margaret had had plenty of time to draw pictures of engines for him, to take him up in her lap and tell him stories, and to sing the most beautiful songs with his own name in them—songs telling about engines and brakes and cars (he liked engines best of all then.) One other thing he remembered: there had been other women visiting with his Aunt Margaret; some of them were his aunties, too, and they had all petted him a great deal and romped about with him. One day, as they were all talking together, one lady laughingly said, "Thomas, which auntie do you think is the prettiest?"

"Aunt Margaret," he replied without a moment's hesitation; "she's the prettiest and best."

They all laughed as tho he had said something amusing, Aunt Margaret with the others.

He did not know then why they laughed, nor did he know now.

It seemed too good to be true, her coming back to stay all summer. He ran thru the house to find Louise, his sister, and tell her the news. He made a great noise, going up stairs three steps at a time, and calling in his big, boyish voice, "Louise! Louise!"

Louise, too, was pleased when she heard it, but she showed her pleasure in a milder way. Louise was three years his senior. Thomas admired her greatly and was very proud of her looks, for she looked like a piece of daintily painted porcelain, with her red lips and pink cheeks, her great blue eyes fringed with long dark lashes, and her beautiful dark hair.

"Louise! Louise! Aunt Margaret's coming," he shouted. "Isn't it fine?"

"Yes, yes, Tom, lovely. But you do not need to muss my shirt waist, just because she's coming. This waist was just fresh, too. Now look at it!"

She looked with dismay at the sleeves, rumpled and mussed by his boyish embrace.

The day for Aunt Margaret's arrival came at last. Thomas, with his horse and cart, was early at the station to meet her. Louise could not come, for the ride in the sun would tan her, and the mother was busy at home putting the last touches to the dinner, that it might be ready when the guest arrived. Then, too, she had Louise's thin gown to press ready for wear in the evening.

As Thomas helped his aunt into the buggy he understood why they had all laughed when he had declared her to be the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

Aunt Margaret was intellectual looking; bright looking; her manner was delightful, but she was not beautiful. Her features were irregular. Her complexion was dark and sallow. She wore eyeglasses, for her eyes were not strong. Her mouth was large? her physique too slender for beauty. Whenever she began to talk or sing no one thought of her looks, and people who had lived in the same house with her were always surprised when anyone else described her as plain. Another strange thing about Aunt Margaret was that, altho she was teacher of advanced mathematics in a great college, and for years had been helping many boys and girls in other ways than hearing their lessons, from her talk no one ever suspected that she had a whole long list of degrees after her name, or that she had ever helped a single boy or girl to grow into honest, honorable manhood and womanhood. For, altho Aunt Margaret talked a great deal and made many a humorous, witty remark, she was very quiet about what she had done or what she intended doing.

The following morning Aunt Margaret did not take the privilege of a guest and lie in bed until a late hour. She arose at the same hour as Mrs. Henderson—that was Tom's mother—and helped prepare the breakfast.

"Shall I tell the children that it is time to get up?" Tom heard his aunt ask.

"They always sleep in the morning," the mother replied. "They do not like early rising, and Louise never seems to feel well."

"I would be surprised if she should," Aunt Margaret replied.

Aunt Margaret and Mrs. Henderson took their breakfast together, while the children slept. Louise came down to breakfast at ten o'clock, and then hurried off to a neighbor's where she had an engagement to play tennis. Thomas left the breakfast table in a flurry and skurry of haste, called "good-bye" from the hall-way, and was off to the river. The water was fine for a swim, and he was anxious to be in before the sun was too hot.

They both were home in time for dinner. Aunt Margaret and Mrs. Henderson were talking over old times.

"Do the Piersons live over on the old farm yet, Alice?" Aunt Margaret asked. "You have been all morning in that hot kitchen; a drive would do you good. What do you say to our going over there later in the afternoon?"

"I cannot possibly. You must never wait your visits until I can go along, for I never know when I can go. I have several waists and a fine dress to iron for Louise, and then there's supper to prepare."

"I had planned to use the horse, anyhow," said Tom. "May Cunningham's cousin is visiting her from the city, and I promised to take them driving up in the country. Her cousin's an awful pretty girl."

"And, mother," said Louise, "you said

you would make me a new shirt waist some time this week. I really haven't one that is fit to wear."

"We'll give it all up," cried Aunt Margaret, good humoredly. "Fine dress to be ironed, shirt waist, and pretty girl from the city have connived against us."

Aunt Margaret spent the greater part of the following days in the kitchen assisting in the cooking and dish washing. Mrs. Henderson in her mild way remonstrated against a guest turning into a servant.

"I came to see and talk with you, Alice, and the only place I find you is in the kitchen or laundry." She took the flat-iron from Mrs. Henderson's hand and began ironing the ruffles on Louise's much ruffled petticoat.

The day before the Fourth of July Aunt Margaret sat alone in the shady side of the lawn. Mrs. Henderson was in the kitchen baking cakes and roasting chickens for Louise to carry to a picnic the following day. Thomas had gone off somewhere with the boys. Louise, comfortable in dressing sacque and slippers, was swinging in a hammock on the porch.

Aunt Margaret seemed to be thinking deeply, for her brow had a great many deep wrinkles straight across. Whatever her perplexity, it was soon decided. The wrinkles disappeared. She arose and went into the kitchen.

"Don't come into this hot kitchen. Stay out where it is comfortable," cried Mrs. Henderson, whose face was scarlet and whose forehead was beaded with perspiration.

"Nevertheless I'm coming," said Aunt Margaret. "But before I come I must announce that I formally declare war. I come with the avowed intention of creating a disturbance. You are to go out under the trees in the shade, and not show yourself in this house until I call you." She took her sister by the shoulders and, gently pushing her from the kitchen, latched the screen door.

"No use saying one word, Alice. I know the icing is not made, the chickens need basting, a salad must be made, and a fresh shirt waist ironed for Louise. All these shall be done—in time. No; I am in earnest. You must go out in the shade."

Mrs. Henderson turned and meekly went across the lawn to the chairs under the trees. Aunt Margaret hurried to the side door and called Louise to come in. Tom, in his cool summer suit and straw hat, was sauntering up the walk. Aunt Margaret called to him to come. As they came into the hall Aunt Margaret locked the door.

"I wish to tell you two something which I do not wish your mother to hear. Come into the kitchen with me."

They followed her into the kitchen.

"This heat is dreadful," said Louise, passing the range quickly and seating herself near the open window. "Now, auntie, do tell us quickly. I want to go back where it's cool."

"It has something to do with a Declaration of Independence. Nothing new in prin-